

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Original) A method of making a bacon product from a frozen bacon belly, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) slicing the frozen bacon belly to provide bacon slices;

(b) coating the bacon slices with an aqueous brine solution to provide brine-soaked bacon slices having a weight uptake of the brine solution of about 8 wt.% to about 15 wt.%, based on the total weight of the frozen bacon belly of step (a); and,

(c) heating the brine-soaked slices obtained from step (b) to form the bacon product,

wherein the bacon slices contain about 18 ppm up to about 80 ppm sodium nitrite.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of partially thawing the bacon slices obtained from step (a) to a temperature of about minus 10°C to about minus 4°C prior to the coating step (b).

3. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the brine solution is applied in step (b) by spraying the brine solution onto the bacon slices.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices have a thickness of about 0.5 mm to about 4 mm.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the coating step (b) comprises drenching or immersing the slices in the brine solution for about 5 seconds to about 10 seconds.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the aqueous brine solution comprises:

(a) about 10 wt.% to about 20 wt.% of sodium chloride, potassium chloride, or a mixture thereof, based on the total weight of the brine solution;

(b) about 0.015 wt.% to about 0.04 wt.% sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate, or a mixture thereof, based on the total weight of the brine solution; and,

(c) 0 wt.% to about 1 wt.% of a phosphate, based on the total weight of the brine solution.

7. (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein the aqueous brine solution comprises about 70 wt.% to about 90 wt.% water, based on the total weight of the brine solution.

8. (Currently amended) The method of claim 6 wherein the aqueous brine solution ~~further~~ comprises about 10 wt.% to about 18 wt.% sodium chloride, based on the total weight of the solution.

9. (Original) The method of claim 6 wherein the brine solution further comprises a material selected from the group consisting of sugar, sodium ascorbate, a smoke flavoring agent, and mixtures thereof.

10. (Currently amended) The method of claim 6 wherein the brine solution further comprises about 1 wt.% to about 8 wt.% of ~~the~~ a smoke flavoring agent.

11. (Currently amended) The method of claim 6 wherein the brine solution further comprises about 1 wt.% to about 6 wt.% of ~~the~~ a smoke flavoring agent.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices contain about 20 ppm to about 75 ppm sodium nitrite.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices contain about 20 ppm to about 60 ppm sodium nitrite.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices contain about 20 ppm to about 50 ppm sodium nitrite.

15. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices contain about 20 ppm to about 40 ppm sodium nitrite.

16. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon product has an "a" color value of about 10 up to 15.

17. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon product has an "a" color value of about 11 to about 14.

18. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon product has an "a" color value of about 12 to about 13.

19. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon slices contain about 10 wt.% to about 12 wt.% brine based on the total weight of the bacon belly of step (a).

20. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the bacon product has a weight percent yield of about 20 to about 50 based on the total weight of the bacon belly of step (a).

21. (Original) The method of claim 20 wherein the bacon product has a weight percent yield of about 25 to about 45 based on the total weight of the bacon belly of step (a).

22. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the frozen bacon bellies are maintained at an internal temperature of about minus 35°C to about minus 15°C

23. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the frozen bacon bellies are maintained at about minus 20°C to about minus 26°C.

24. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein, in step (b), the bacon slices are coated with the aqueous brine solution at a temperature of less than about 0°C.

25. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein, in step (b), the bacon slices are coated with the aqueous brine solution at a temperature of about minus 10°C to about minus 4°C.